

Sundry Old and New Year Thoughts

I.

It is not enough that we should live the coming year just as we have lived this year. That would be retrograding. For, unless we live better and worthier, truer and nobler, we do not live as well. To make no progress is to go backward. An artist was once asked whether his last picture was his best and answered, No, my best is the next one. That was the true spirit of progress. Our best year should be the one yet in the future. The next in everything should be our best. Today should be better than yesterday, tomorrow better than today; this year better than last year, the next year better than this year. That means real progress, and anything less than that is not growth.

II.

The largest thought in the hearts of most people, and especially children during the holiday season, is the thought of getting presents, and yet the very opposite of this is the real Christ spirit. The mail service and the express companies have been crowded and taxed to their full capacity during the last ten days carrying presents from one person to another. True, where there is a recipient of a gift there must also be a donor; a present getter means a present giver, yet the one thought that needs to be taught our young people and children is that Christmas is a time of giving rather than of getting. It is the celebration of the day when God gave to this dying world the greatest of all gifts, even the only begotten of the Father full of glory and truth.

III.

"A Happy New Year," is our greeting to one another these days. Do we stop to think what that means? There is a something, we know not what, at this season of the year that makes us feel as tho there were a cessation of time for a moment, and that each one of us would make a new beginning. This however is not the case. The transition from the month of December to the month of January is the same exactly as the transition from any one month to another. The last of each December and the first of each January marks the closing of an old and the opening of a new year, and it seems peculiarly fitting that at such times we should, more than at others, greet our friends with "a happy new year." What does this mean? With too many it is a mere formality instead of, as it should be, a real and genuine prayer, the expression of an honest and full heart. The greeting, "a happy new year," should carry with it a willingness to help those whom we greet, to be happy. Unless you are willing to make some sacrifice to incarnate your wish into something real, practical, helpful, then your greeting is naught but idle words and carries with it no real meaning. This one thing we should remember, that each one carries the secret of happiness in his own person, and to wish one a happy new year should carry with it a prayer that Christ may enter into that heart really and fully and deeply and wholly, that there may come into that life the divine blessing, the sweet peace and the everlasting blessedness.

IV.

There is more than one way of numbering our days. We may count them off each day as they come and go. This is

easily done, requiring but a very meager knowledge of the science of mathematics. Any one can do this. When the day closes we are simply one day older, and so on the full round of the year. That is all. But unless each day finds us better we have lived in vain that day. If we have left no worthy record on the day's page, if we have made no advancement in the life that really is, if we have not strengthened ourselves and helped others to be better and do better, if we have not worked into the day that is about to take its place with that portion of time designated as the past, some pure thought, some sweet word, some noble deed, that will bless others and make their burdens lighter, then we have not lived up to the measure of our responsibility. The poet expresses the thought in this way:

Count that day lost whose low descending sun,
Views from thy hand no worthy action done.

Numbering our days according to the instructions of Moses in that memorable ninetieth Psalm, that numbering of our days which applies the heart unto wisdom, fills each day with the record of good and beautiful living along all the lines of growth in character. Emperor Titus used to say, whenever a day past in which he had done no good deed, I have lost a day. During the past year, the past decade, how many days have we lost? Sad it is when evening comes and the day closes with not a record of a single noble deed. But sadder yet will it be when the evening of life comes, and not one day, but all our days are lost. It is well that at this time our view should be retrospective as well as prospective. Very profitably we may look back over the story of a closing year, a closing earthly life it may be, and take note of our record. What records have we made? True, it is not wise to brood over past mistakes, but he is the wise man, not who makes no mistakes, but who does not repeat them. Well numbered days always prepare us for better days to come.

V.

"How old art thou?" said Pharaoh to the aged patriarch Jacob as he stood before him with lines in his face that told of years of sorrow. As Jacob viewed his life it was mostly evil. How common it is for old age to recall all its griefs and sorrows, its buried love and disappointments. It was a grave answer Jacob gave the monarch of Egypt. "Few and evil have been the days of the years of my pilgrimage." Few indeed; yet he had lived 175 years, but compared with the age of his forefathers he was but as a boy ten years old. Compared with the age of the world or with eternity his days were few. Enough there were to see much trouble and sorrow, and for the time being the old patriarch could think only of the evil that had come into his life. Yet Jacob had seen days of joy and gladness. His life was not all evil, no one person's life is. And the time came when Jacob saw another side to his life. When he was about to make his removal from this world to one which was visible only to faith, the remembrance of God's mercy and goodness cheered him onward and he could die talking of better things. Hear him in his dying message: "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads." What blessed words, and how sweet to the weary pilgrim who in other days could recollect only the grief